

# *Field Report*

## Allegheny Portage National Historic Site

### ■ 1.0 Summary

The Allegheny Portage Railroad was the first railroad constructed over the Allegheny Mountains. This inclined plane railroad operated between 1834 and 1854 and has great historical significance; both as a technological innovation, and for its role in helping to open the U.S. interior to trade and settlement. The Railroad ran for a distance of 36 miles between Holidaysburg and Johnstown, connecting two parts of the Pennsylvania Canal. A series of 10 inclines were used to go over the mountains. The opening of the railroad reduced the travel time between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh from 23 days to less than five, providing a significant boost to the population and economy of western Pennsylvania.

This site was established by an Act of Congress on August 31, 1964 which authorized the acquisition of lands and historic features as may be necessary “to illustrate the significant role of the Allegheny Portage Railroad and the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal in the Nation’s history.” Allegheny Portage National Historic Site (NHS) is currently focused on a concentrated area near the Visitor Center. The Visitor Center is located off Route 22 near Incline 6, the highest spot along the old railroad. Most of the current attractions are within walking distance of the Center, which was completed in 1992. Current attractions include the Engine House 6 Exhibit Building, the Incline 6 Trail, the Lemon House, the Skew Arch Bridge and a picnic area.

In addition to the current attractions, two major expansions of activity are about to be initiated. The Park is currently in the final stages of design for a hiking trail of 6.4 miles, mostly along the trace of the original Portage Railroad east of the Visitor Center. This trail is called the Portage Trace/Corridor Trail, or “Six through 10 Trail” since it connects those incline stations from the original Railroad. Two parking areas are being planned in addition to existing parking facilities at the Visitor Center. The NPS also plans to open the Staple Bend Tunnel, the first railroad tunnel built in the U.S. (1831), which is located at Mineral Point, approximately 20 miles west of the Visitor Center. The Tunnel will be accessed via a relatively level, two-mile hiking trail that runs along the route of the original Portage Railroad. Because the trail uses the historic trace, and elements of the original railroad are still found, it is not considered appropriate for vehicular access.

Potential Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs have been identified for this site as follows:

- Given the steep grade and length of the Six through 10 Trail, a shuttle service between the Visitor Center and the foot of the trail at Mill Road could help to increase usage and enhance the visitor experience. It is likely that many visitors will want to hike down at least part of the trail to experience the Portage Railroad right-of-way but that

a much smaller number will be willing and/or able to hike back up the mountain. Service could be scheduled regularly during periods of peak usage (summer peak visitation season or weekends only) between the Visitor Center, the Skew Arch Bridge, the Muleshoe Curve Bridge parking area and the foot of the Trail. Alternatively, demand responsive service could be provided, with phones or push-button/speaker panels at key locations. Demand responsive service could be used as a method to test the demand for service.

- The Staple Bend Tunnel is located approximately 20 miles from the Allegheny Portage Visitor Center and approximately four miles from the Johnstown Flood National Memorial. Access from the east is via Legislative Route 11078, a steep, narrow road. Limited parking and a comfort station are being provided at the trailhead and a golf cart will be available for users who cannot hike to the Tunnel. Shuttle or demand responsive service from either Allegheny Portage or Johnstown Flood may be considered in the future, but will depend on the level of demand at this site.

## ■ 2.0 Background Information

### 2.1 Location

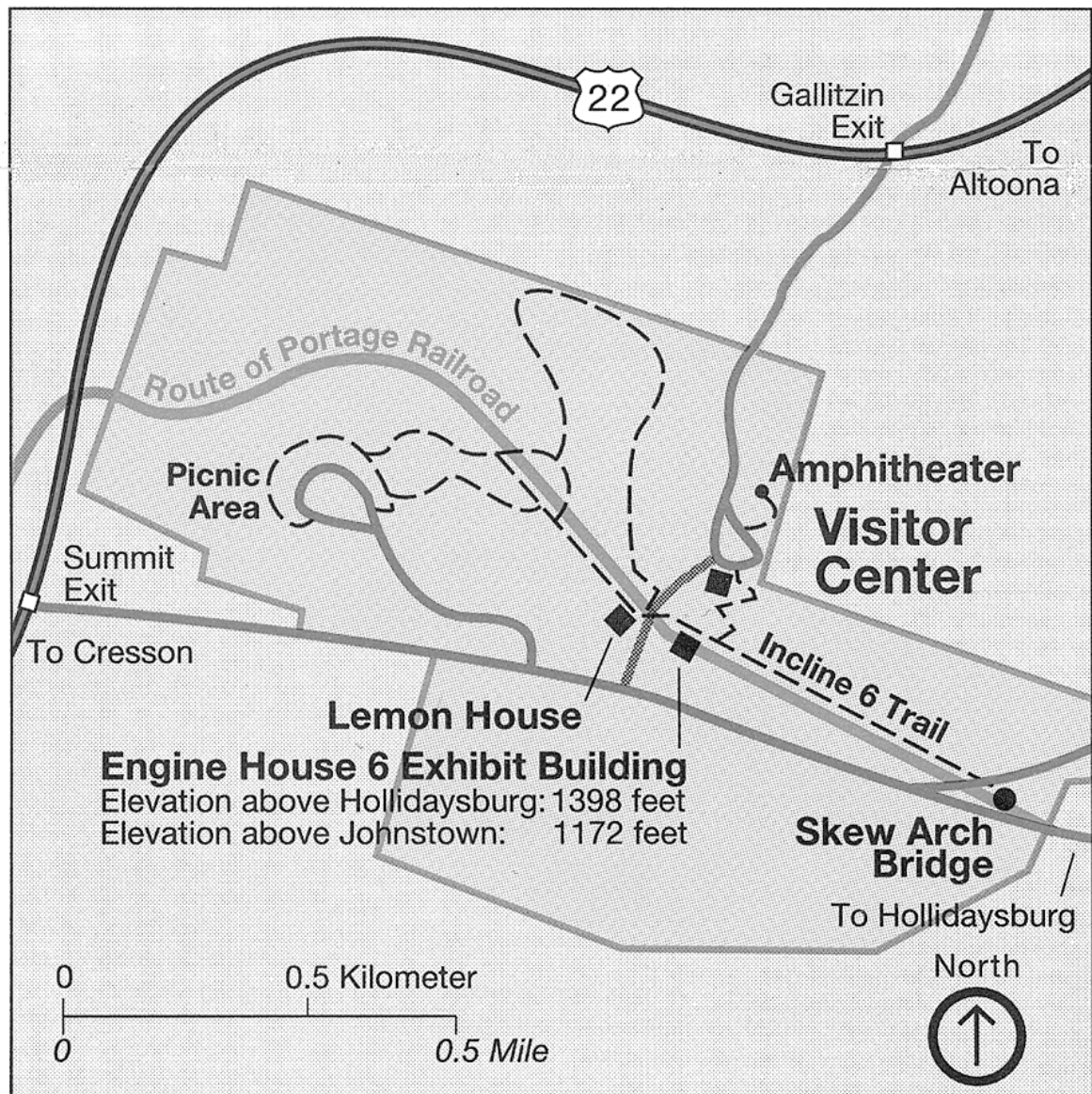
The Allegheny Portage NHS is located in southwestern Pennsylvania, approximately 12 miles west of Altoona, off the U.S. Route 22 expressway. The two closest towns to the site are Cresson and Gallizin.

### 2.2 Administration and Classification

The Allegheny Portage NHS is part of a four-site administrative unit in southwestern Pennsylvania that also includes the Johnstown Flood National Memorial, the Fort Necessity National Battlefield and the Friendship Hill NHS.

### 2.3 Physical Description

The Allegheny Portage NHS contains approximately 1,500 acres. The major park attractions, including the Visitor Center, the reconstructed Engine House 6 (with archaeological remains of the original Engine House), the Historic Lemon House Tavern and the Skew Arch Bridge are all located within short walking distance of each other. A picnic area is also nearby although vehicular access to this area is located off old Route 22, rather than the Route 22 expressway. The Park is currently developing two new facilities that will significantly extend the physical reach of park visitor attractions, the Six through 10 Trail and the Staple Bend Tunnel. These improvements are described in more detail below. Figure 1 shows the Park site with major attractions.

**Figure 1. Site Map**

## 2.4 Mission and Goals of the National Historic Site

This site was established by an Act of Congress on August 31, 1964 which authorized the acquisition of lands and historic features as may be necessary "to illustrate the significant role of the Allegheny Portage Railroad and the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal in the Nation's history." Subsequent legislation identified additional purposes:

"Provide for the interpretation and preservation of the remaining portions of the Allegheny Portage Railroad route not included in the NHS through cooperative agreements with the state of Pennsylvania, political subdivisions

thereof, corporations, associations, or individuals, and to erect markers or tablets in accordance with the Antiquities Act of 1935.

“Participate through the Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission in recognizing, preserving, promoting and making available to the public the cultural heritage of the nine county region associated with the iron, steel, coal and transportation industries.”

## **2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile**

The estimated number of annual visitors is 120,000. Visitation is concentrated primarily in the summer months although educational trips are common in during the spring. Weekend visitation is about 60 to 70 percent higher than weekday visitation during the peak season. There are a series of Saturday night programs during the summer that attract the largest crowds. These events are the only times when the capacity of the parking areas is approached or exceeded.

## **■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

### **3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

The Visitor Center and picnic areas are located at a mountain top site with direct access to the Route 22 expressway. The site is well signed from the highway and the nearby town of Cresson provides basic services. Parking supply at both the Visitor Center and picnic area are adequate to serve demand. Average visitation is about two hours.

The new facilities planned, the Six through 10 Trail and the Staple Bend Tunnel will both have very limited parking facilities available. In addition, since they are hiking trails, visitor turnover will be slower than the rate now experienced in the Visitor Center area.

Another area of concern is that of pedestrian safety along the hiking trail. The Skew Arch Bridge, one of the major attractions along the trail, is located in the median of old Route 22. To reach the bridge from the Visitor Center, visitors currently have to cross the westbound lanes of old Route 22. While this crossing can be hazardous, the traffic along this section is traveling up a steep hill. When the Six through 10 Trail is fully open, hikers will need to cross the southbound lanes as well, a downhill section where vehicular speeds are likely to be higher. Plans for the trail have addressed this situation, and money for traffic calming and pedestrian safety improvements are included in the budget. Figure 2 shows the Portage Trace Corridor Plan.





### **3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

The planned improvements to Allegheny Portage fit into an overall strategy to promote tourism in the region. The Allegheny Ridge State Heritage Park currently covers a corridor along major waterways in Cambria and Blair Counties (see Figure 3). A proposed extension to the corridor would incorporate the Juniata River Valley in Huntingdon County as well. The “trail” is really a series of connected segments that include waterways, bicycling/hiking trails and local streets in the Towns along the corridor. The objectives of the Heritage Park and associated trail system include promotion of tourism in the area by providing access to natural areas and by encouraging the development of tourist-related businesses in the towns along the corridor. The area has experienced loss of population and employment over many years as its industrial and resource base has declined. While the Six through 10 Trail does directly impact several residential properties at its eastern end, the development goals of the Allegheny Portage NHS appear to be highly compatible with those of the region.

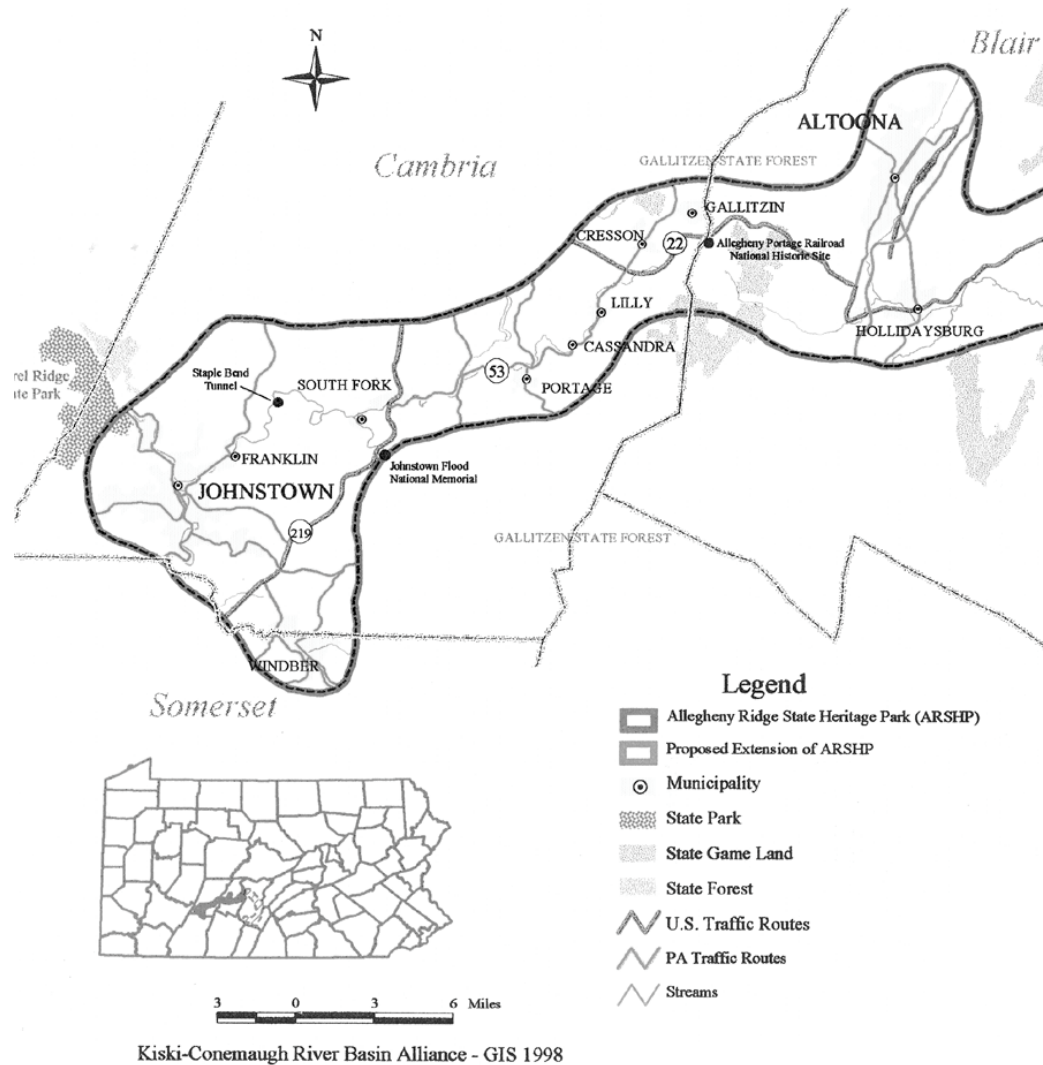
As the Allegheny Ridge State Heritage Park develops, an ATS may have broader application, enabling tourists to take one-way trips via foot, bicycle and/or water and be shuttled back to their point of origin. The Allegheny Portage NHS is currently working closely with the management of the State Heritage Park on trail development issues and ATS will certainly become part of this agenda.

### **3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

Preservation of the historic trace of the Allegheny Portage Railroad is of prime concern in development of both the Staple Bend Tunnel and the Six through 10 Trail. The Six through 10 Trail, due to its steep grade, is particularly susceptible to degradation and thus will be limited to hiking. Other resources in the area include State Game Lands and a reservoir for the City of Altoona.

### **3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

The addition of the Six through 10 Trail and the Staple Bend Tunnel represents a significant expansion of recreational opportunities at the Allegheny Portage NHS. As discussed in Section 2.2, these additions are part of an overall recreational development strategy for the region. One of the more significant recreational activities in the region is hunting. The NPS has worked closely with the State Game Commission and others to assure that the needs of hunters and other recreational users can both be accommodated.

**Figure 3. The Allegheny Ridge State Heritage Park and Proposed Extension**

## ■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

### 4.1 Unit Plans

A management statement developed in 1992 currently provides the overall planning framework for the Park. Specific plans have been prepared for the Park's proposed trail development:

- *Statement for Management, Allegheny Portage NHS, 1992;*
- *Draft Portage Trace Corridor Plan and Environmental Assessment, June 1996;*

- *Final Portage Trace Corridor Plan*, February 1997; and
- *Allegheny Ridge State Heritage Park Trail Initiative* – 1998, Allegheny Ridge Trails Team in cooperation with Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance.

## **4.2 Public and Agency Coordination**

The Park is working closely with the Allegheny Ridge State Heritage Park management (Allegheny Ridge Corporation) to coordinate trail development and economic development efforts in the region. Other coordination efforts involve:

- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (DOT) and Department of Conservation and Natural Resources are supporting trail design efforts.
- The Park is working with Pennsylvania DOT on pedestrian safety issues at the Skew Arch bridge crossing of old Route 22.
- The Park has discussed tying the Portage Railroad in with bus tours to other area railroad attractions, Horseshoe Curve and Gallizin Tunnels. The Altoona Transit Authority (AMTRAN) and the Altoona Railroaders, who run the Horseshoe Curve tours, have been involved in these discussions.
- Coordination with the State Game Commission has been necessary to assure that the needs of both hunters and trail users are accommodated where the trail is adjacent to State Game Lands.
- Extensive coordination has been required with local property owners and municipalities for provide trail access. Several issues regarding parking remain to be resolve.

## **■ 5.0 Assessment of Need**

### **5.1 Magnitude of Need**

ATS has significant potential to increase usage of the Six through 10 Trail and enhance the experience of those who visit the Park. While it may take time for usage of the trail to build, an ATS in place at the trail opening will help increase its attractiveness as a destination.

### **5.2 Feasible Alternatives**

- An on demand shuttle service serving the Six through 10 Trail, including the Skew Arch Bridge, the Muleshoe Curve Bridge Parking Lot and the foot of the trail. The



service would be dispatched from the Visitor Center. Pick up times could be arranged in advance or phones, push-button speakers provided at parking areas along the trail.

- A regularly scheduled shuttle service could run on a regular schedule between the Visitor Center and the foot of the trail, stopping at parking areas. Half-hour service during daytime hours would be adequate if shelters and good informational services are provided. The Park may consider testing demand on summer weekends before instituting daily service.
- A shuttle service to the Staple Bend Tunnel is a longer-term possibility that should be evaluated when the Tunnel is opened to the public. The cost of this shuttle would be significant due to the distance involved. A partnering effort with other area railroad-related attractions, including the Horseshoe Curve and Gallizin Tunnels, should be initiated in the future.

## ■ 6.0 Bibliography

*Statement for Management, Allegheny Portage NHS, 1992.*

*Draft Portage Trace Corridor Plan and Environmental Assessment, June 1996.*

*Final Portage Trace Corridor Plan, February 1997.*

*Allegheny Ridge State Heritage Park Trail Initiative – 1998, Allegheny Ridge Trails Team in cooperation with Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance.*

## ■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

Joanne Hawley, Superintendent

Keith Newlin, Chief of Maintenance

John Turner, Allegheny Ridge Corporation

Brad Clemmenson, Office of Congressman John Murtha